

# At-risk youth will be focus of new county group

BY SEAN R. SEDAM  
STAFF WRITER

African Americans make up a disproportionate number of children in the county's juvenile services and court systems, special education programs and on the roll of students in need of assistance.

On Tuesday, county government, schools and law enforcement officials pledged to find out why by agreeing to form the Interdisciplinary Group on At-Risk Children.

The group, which will not be formed until the first week of December, will study why children with difficulties in school or at home often end up in the legal system and how to change that, said County Councilman Michael L. Subin (D-At large) of Gaithersburg.

"My vision is the point at which we have no more problems with at-risk youth is the point at which [the group] will be able to dissolve," he said.

Trudye Johnson, who will retire as executive director of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission at the end of the year, will serve as the interim leader of the group, whose membership will be announced the first week of December.

Subin was flanked during a noontime news conference in

Rockville by council members Nancy M. Floreen and Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown, school board member Valerie Ervin, Deputy State's Attorney John McCarthy and Sheriff Raymond M. Kight (D).

All three council members and Kight are running for re-election. Ervin (Dist. 4) of Silver Spring is running for the District 5 seat on the council. McCarthy (D) is running for state's attorney.

The incumbents denied that the election had anything to do with Tuesday's announcement. "Politics doesn't get in the way of leadership here," said Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park.

Subin said he realized the extent of the problem about six weeks ago when the council's Education Committee, which he chairs, was briefed on the disproportionate number of African-American males in special education in county schools. African Americans make up 20.9 percent of the enrollment, but 36.1 percent of students labeled emotionally disturbed, according to County Council staff.

"In special education, 50 percent of the youths sent out of this jurisdiction are African-American males," Subin said. "There is no superficial explanation for this, nothing intuitively that makes sense. Most of those males are then seen in the juvenile justice system."